

Fort Detrick Takes Cleanup Plan to Public

by

Eileen Mitchell, U.S. Army Garrison Fort Detrick

Fort Detrick, Md., officials drew more than 100 residents of nearby Frederick to a briefing on the installation's plan for removing buried chemicals from its facilities.

Meeting at a local elementary school, inhabitants of the northwestern Maryland city listened to a presentation by Lt. Col. Jeffery Springer, chief of Ft. Detrick's Safety Office, and gave their input on the plan.

"By addressing public concerns early, honestly and face-to-face at public meetings, many misunderstandings can be avoided," Springer said.

Input from the public meeting and other comments received are being incorporated in a Fort Detrick decision document that summarizes all research and recommendations surrounding this action.

The Ft. Detrick Environmental Partnership recommended convening a meeting even though the post had received no formal request from the public. The partnership consists of representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Maryland Department of the Environment, the U.S. Army Environmental Center and other Army organizations.

Following his 12-minute briefing, Springer answered questions from the audience. For two hours, he responded to most of the concerns expressed.

Springer said that the removal would limit the potential for future off-site migration of elevated concentrations of contaminants originating from chemical waste disposal pits.

The objective of the action is to remove all known primary contaminant sources from a location on Ft. Detrick called Area B that are contributing to groundwater contamination, Springer said. "This will permanently eliminate any risks to humans or other ecological populations due to the presence of buried waste."

He said that, during the public meeting, many residents requested that their wells be tested for contaminants. Springer told the residents that, if they lived within the vicinity of the contaminated area, they could call to have their wells tested.

Springer told the residents that the Army had taken approximately 200 water samples from 43 private wells over the past eight years. Between 1992 and 1995, only five wells showed contamination above EPA acceptable levels. Fort Detrick supplied bottled water to those homes with chemical concentrations above EPA limits. Since 1995, no private wells exceeded the EPA level.

Springer said that work on the \$4.8 million removal project is expected to begin in February 2001. He said the process would take about four months to complete. Fort Detrick first detected groundwater contaminants in 1992. Studies determined that chemical waste had been disposed of in Area B from 1955 to 1970. The studies showed that there were one confirmed and two suspected trenches containing the waste. Each trench was about 12 feet wide, 15 feet deep and 20 feet long. The contaminants are trichloroethylene and perchloroethylene (PCE), which are organic solvents. PCE is a suspected carcinogen.

During his briefing, Springer explained the course of action selected for removal of the chemical waste.

Pipes will be installed beneath and around the pit area and then "super-chilled" salt water will be sent through the pipes to create a thick layer of frozen soil, similar to permafrost, to

create an impermeable barrier. Excavation and off-site incineration at a licensed hazardous waste facility will follow.

The final stage will be to backfill with clean soil, cover it with six inches of topsoil and re-seed.